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# UNH Historian Recounts Effort to Regulate Whaling Industry in New Book

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*UNH Media Relations*

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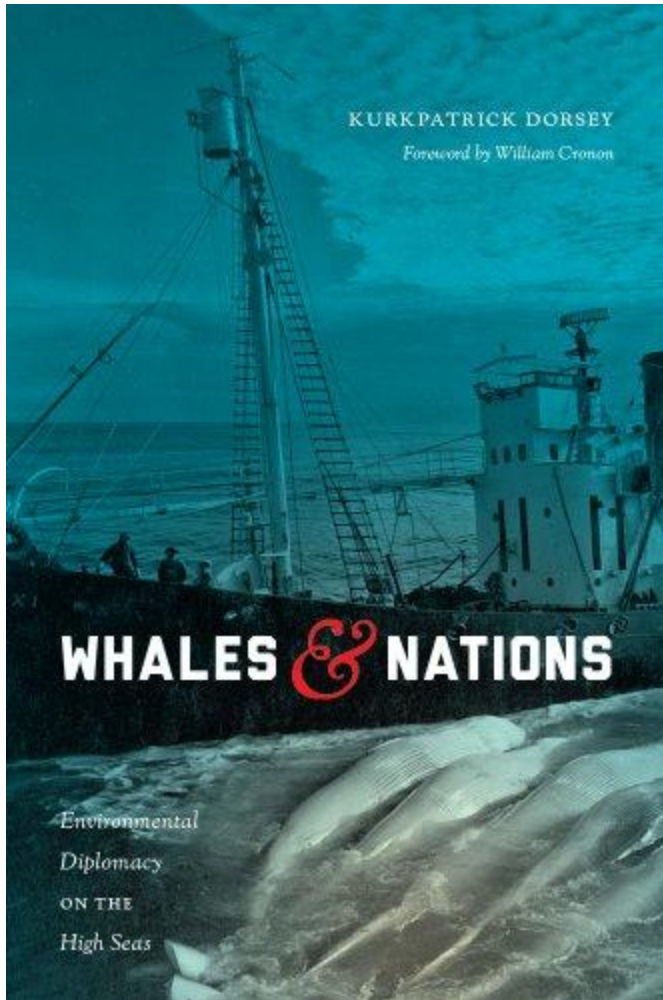
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## Media Relations

February 6, 2014

### UNH Historian Recounts Effort to Regulate Whaling Industry in New Book



In “Whales and Nations: Environmental Diplomacy on the High Seas,” (University of Washington Press, 2014) Kurkpatrick Dorsey, associate professor of history at the University of New Hampshire, tells the story of the international negotiation, scientific research, and industrial development behind these efforts - and their ultimate failure.

an unprecedented scale. By the 1920s, declining whale populations prompted efforts to develop “rational” -- what today would be called sustainable -- whaling practices.

But even though almost everyone involved with commercial whaling knew that the industry was on an unsustainable path, Dorsey argues that powerful economic, political, and scientific forces made failure nearly inevitable.

“Why had these knowledgeable and powerful people been unable to put whaling on a sustainable course? Part of the answer comes from the widespread agreement that whales were masses of meat and blubber that were

DURHAM, N.H. – Before commercial whaling was outlawed in the 1980s, diplomats, scientists, bureaucrats, environmentalists, and sometimes even whalers themselves attempted to create an international regulatory framework that would allow for a sustainable whaling industry.

In “Whales and Nations: Environmental Diplomacy on the High Seas,” (University of Washington Press, 2014) Kurkpatrick Dorsey, associate professor of history at the University of New Hampshire, tells the story of the international negotiation, scientific research, and industrial development behind these efforts - and their ultimate failure.

“As a teenager growing up in Southern Ohio, I played a board game at summer camp called ‘Save the Whales.’ What were we saving the whales from? From the whalers, of course, but also from the International Whaling Commission and the general attitude that whales were better as food than as something to be preserved,” Dorsey says.

“I wouldn’t generally recommend using a board game to learn about history, but in this case, the game helped sparked my interest. Why were people so angry about the International Whaling Commission? Why were people arguing about the proper use of a whale? Thirty years later, I have finally written this book,” he says.

“Whales and Nations” begins in the early 20th century, when new technology revived the fading whaling industry and made whale hunting possible on

meant to be harvested. New refining techniques converted whale oil to margarine, which meant that many Europeans encountered whales as a thin spread on their morning toast, and most governments were determined to keep the oil flowing,” he says.

Based on a deep engagement with diplomatic history and access to extensive archival resources in Norway, Great Britain, United States, New Zealand, and Australia, the papers of the International Whaling Commission, and the papers of prominent whalers and scientists, “Whales and Nations” provides a unique perspective on the challenges facing international conservation projects. This history has profound implications for today’s pressing questions of global environmental cooperation and sustainability.

“One hundred years after Sir Sidney Harmer’s prophetic warning that whaling in Antarctic waters was on an unsustainable course, most people who encounter whales cannot imagine harpooning Willy. But have we learned lessons for solving the ocean’s problems?” Dorsey asks.

The [University of New Hampshire](#), founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state’s flagship public institution, enrolling 12,300 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

#### VIDEO

Kurkpatrick Dorsey, associate professor of history at the University of New Hampshire, discusses his new book *Whales and Nations: Environmental Diplomacy on the High Seas*.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QsLIM5KTx0>

Credit: University of Washington Press

#### PHOTOS

Kurkpatrick Dorsey, associate professor of history at the University of New Hampshire.

[http://www.unh.edu/universityevents/speakersbureau/images/dor\\_PAS1889.jpg](http://www.unh.edu/universityevents/speakersbureau/images/dor_PAS1889.jpg)

Whales and Nations: Environmental Diplomacy on the High Seas

[http://www.unh.edu/news/img/dorsey\\_whalesandnations.jpg](http://www.unh.edu/news/img/dorsey_whalesandnations.jpg)

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